



Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota Journal

Volume 34

Article 11

January 2007

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Recommended Citation

Mackenzie, L. (2007). Not Your Average Speech of Self-Introduction: The "Talking Resume" Alternative. *Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota Journal*, 34, 109-112.

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***Not Your Average Speech of Self-Introduction:
The "Talking Résumé" Alternative***

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ABSTRACT

The "talking résumé" activity is designed as a creative and useful alternative to the standard speech of self-introduction exercise in the university public speaking classroom. Using Visual Communicator software, this assignment guides students through the process of preparing, orally delivering, and critiquing résumés for themselves and their classmates. This brief article is geared toward public speaking instructors looking for innovative ways to begin the semester and provides suggestions for how to assign, conduct, and evaluate the "talking résumé" activity.

Introduction

The first assignment given to students in the average college-level public speaking class is the speech of self-introduction. To assist instructors in assigning this first speech, the majority of introductory public speaking textbooks suggest a standard set of first-speech-of-the-semester activities such as: introducing a classmate (Andrews, Andrews, & Williams, 2002), using a personal object to introduce yourself (Lucas, 2007), conducting a self-awareness inventory (Osborn & Osborn, 2000) and informing the audience of a current issue (Beebe & Beebe, 2003). Although these kinds of assignments are often a fun and simple way to start off the semester, I would like to propose a more challenging, useful and technologically advanced activity for the semester's first speech: the "talking résumé" activity. Using *Visual Communicator* software (or the program of your choice), this assignment guides students through the process of preparing, orally delivering, and critiquing résumés for themselves and their classmates.

This brief article is geared toward public speaking instructors looking for innovative ways to begin the semester and provides suggestions for how to assign, conduct, and evaluate the "talking résumé" activity. This assignment not only hones students' public speaking skills, but also assists them in designing a résumé and critiquing the "talking résumés" of their classmates.

Application

I typically assign this first speech around the second or third week of the semester. Before doing so, I am in contact with an IT specialist on campus with whom I coordinate the day, time and place for filming the “talking résumés.” It is helpful to have someone film the speeches (in the campus film studio, if you have one) while you grade, if possible, but it is certainly an assignment an instructor can conduct on his/her own.

If your college/university has purchased *Visual Communicator 3* (information on this software can be found at www.seriousmagic.com) this is a great program for filming the “talking résumés”. This program provides the background design and graphics for students’ names and information as well as a teleprompter, video creation capabilities, and templates that make the “talking résumés” look very professional. If your department is not able to purchase this program, you will need a laptop and webcam or camcorder to film these on your own and view and evaluate the speeches after they are delivered. The activity can certainly be conducted without the software, but using *Visual Communicator* makes the overall experience of putting together the “talking résumés” activity easier and more efficient.

Once the date, time and place is coordinated and I have done a sample run-through a week before speech day, I write up an assignment sheet so that the students will know where to go, what to prepare for, and how they will be graded.

For example, at the top of the assignment sheet you might choose to write:

This “talking résumé” speech will be delivered extemporaneously from brief typewritten notes that occupy no more than one page. Students may not read their speeches and should use as much eye contact as possible. Before delivering the speech, each speaker will prepare a résumé that s/he will then deliver orally in front of a camera in a designated studio space on campus.

The speaker will need to provide interesting information about him/herself - including basic facts such as home town, academic major, personal interests, hobbies, career aspirations, etc. However, the speech should not be a simple recitation of biographical data. Students should be creative in their self-presentation and avoid a boring list of standard information.

I ask students to re-read the section in their textbook for guidance in preparing and delivering an introductory speech. I then remind them that their “talking résumé” speech should include the following information:

- 1. Your name and the kind of position you are looking for*
- 2. Your educational experience (including your major)*
- 3. Your employment history (any applicable experience you have)*
- 4. Your personal interests (think of what makes you unique)*
- 5. Your contact information (conclude by stating how you can be reached)*

Of course, at the bottom of the assignment sheet I write (and remind them orally in class) that the speech will be timed and should take 1-2 minutes. I ask them to practice often so that

they maintain eye contact with the camera, but I let them know they can keep one piece of paper with notes (or their résumé itself) in front of them while they are speaking.

I also like to reiterate to students the benefits of keeping a professional, up-to-date résumé throughout their college careers. Even if the students are freshman (and quite a ways off from graduating) they may choose to gear their résumé away from a full time professional position and toward a summer job or internship. Despite the content of the résumé, it is extremely important for students to be able to speak about their work/ academic experiences (and not just write about them) in an interview setting – and this assignment gives them a great chance to practice doing so.

Evaluation

How you evaluate this assignment depends on the point system you are using, but I gave students the option of earning a total of 25 points (out of a possible 200 for the semester). I created an evaluation sheet that broke down the points as follows:

1. *Staying within the 1-2 minute time limit (5 points)*
2. *Sustaining eye contact with the camera (5 points)*
3. *Evidence of advance preparation leading to a creative presentation (5 points)*
4. *Including the 5 résumé talking points listed in "Application" section (10 points)*

I discuss the various aspects of the "talking résumé" that they will be graded on in class and show them a copy of the evaluation sheet I will use to determine their score.

Conclusion

The class after the "talking résumés" are delivered is devoted to a class-wide critique. Before I show each speech (if you have 25 students, it takes about 50 minutes) on screen in the classroom, I ask my student to write each of their classmates' names on a separate note card. As they are viewing the "talking résumés", they are assigned to write one thing the speaker did well and one thing the speaker needs to work on for their next speech on the note card. When I return my evaluation sheet and grade to my students, I include their classmates' note cards so that they have a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their speech.

I have conducted this activity over the course of one academic year and found that my students responded very favorably to it. Given the career-mindedness of most college students, it is hard for them to deny the relevance and applicability of this assignment to their lives outside of the classroom.

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